

<p>Synopsis of Community Meetings And Interviews with Interested Parties</p>

NNW conducted two community meetings in the Southeast Area and interviewed interested parties with the LAUSD and within the Southeast Area community. The following is a synopsis of the various meetings in an effort to record the opinion of those affected by the study proposal. The synopsis is in chronological order.

Meeting with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)

On September 17, 2001, NNW met with LAUSD representatives to discuss the study scope, timelines, and data needed from the District. The District did not take a position on the reorganization discussed in the Southeast area. The District assigned a contact person and has worked cooperatively throughout the study to provide us with materials requested.

Meeting with the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA)

On October 3, 2001, NNW met with leadership from UTLA briefing the union about the study scope and timelines and garnered input, from the union's perspective, as to the state of LAUSD's schools in the Southeast area.

The union is on the record as opposed to any action to reorganize LAUSD. Leadership believes that the problems of LAUSD (e.g. overcrowded schools) are independent of the District and reside primarily with the Consent Degree that has limited school construction because racial segregation goals are difficult to meet. Also related to the facilities issues is the problem finding "clean" land, the unpopularity of the eminent domain processes and accessing state funds.

UTLA expressed the following positives about LAUSD:

- LAUSD's test scores are up, notably in District J.
- As the largest school district in California (12% of California's enrollment in public schools), the District, according to UTLA, has a great amount of political clout enabling more resources to be allotted to the District versus the rest of the state's schools.
- Administratively, the District is more efficient than a smaller district due to size – statistics were quoted by UTLA that show the District spending less than the average unified district in the State on administration.

LAUSD's move to a decentralized district model was not viewed as entirely successful by UTLA, albeit politically necessary. An amount of \$35 million was quoted as being spent to reorganize administratively without any real results. It

was stated that site administrators were moving to the newly created district level positions and, as a consequence, there is “a lot of turmoil at the school sites.”

UTLA has cited the following concerns about forming a Southeast area school district:

- The new district will face a shortage of experienced teachers as senior teachers elect to remain employed by LAUSD.
- The difficulty of recruiting teachers to the Southeast area.
- A loss of political clout of a smaller Southeast area district.
- Increased overcrowding in schools as students bused to other LAUSD districts are returned to the Southeast area.
- Increased potential for conflicts of interest among elected officials in the Southeast area.
- There are no administrative facilities in the Southeast area.
- Cost of starting up a new district, including legal costs, needs to be considered, especially without additional resources.
- Increased cost of administration is likely.
- In general, how would a new district benefit students?

Meeting with the Southeast Cities for Educational Empowerment (SECEDE)

On October 17, 2001, NNW met with SECEDE, a committee of Southeast Area civic leaders concerned about public education and the sponsors of SB 1380 (Chapter 335/2000). At the meeting, NNW briefed the committee about the study scope and timelines and garnered input, from the committee’s perspective, as to the condition of LAUSD’s schools in the Southeast area.

The committee listed many issues that they felt were not being adequately addressed by the District. The following summarizes the committee’s issues:

Governance and Access to Decision-Makers

- Lack of adequate representation with only one trustee from the region on the LAUSD board.
- “Inaction by District management” due to too many departments, too many levels of bureaucracy and too many competing demands from throughout the District.
- The District is not as decentralized as it should be or advertises to be – the committee referred to a report by the District’s Inspector General, Don Mullimax.

Facilities Concerns

- Overcrowded facilities and poor general condition of the facilities that have not been adequately addressed.
- The Southeast area started year round schools 20+ years ago and other schools in LAUSD are only now starting on year round schedules.

Resource Equity Issues

- Resources are diverted away from Southeast, despite the Consent Degree. The committee believed the District is out of compliance with the terms of the court-ordered desegregation plan.
- There are a higher percentage of non-credentialed teachers in the District J area than in the rest of the District.
- The ratio of computers to students is lower in the Southeast area as compared to the rest of the District.
- The educational program is not as rich in the Southeast area as compared to the rest of the District.
- There are fewer magnet programs in the Southeast area.

Educational Programs Issues

- Since the number of continuation schools and alternative education schools in the Southeast area is lower than the rest of the District, there is a greater chance that certain students will drop out.
- Course offerings are not equitable because of the year round tracks – for example, it may look like many courses are offered but in fact it is difficult for pupils to access desired courses due to scheduling conflicts.
 - Track B is the worst educationally, teachers favor the schedule of other tracks over Track B so there are more uncredentialed and inexperienced teachers on Track B – thus students suffer.
 - There are fewer counselors for Track B.
- English Language Learner classes and remedial instructional classes cannot be offered due to lack of space.
- High percentage of emergency credentialed teachers.
- Low Academic Placement Index scores.
- Concerns about high drop out rates, low college entrance rates and higher class sizes.
- Summer school is all conducted through independent study, as there is no classroom space available.
- Little field space is available for sports.
- The Concept 6 year round program has too few days, and the school days are too long for the attention span of children.

Operational Concerns

- The food service program is “horrible”, the District uses heating kitchens only, the cafeterias are overcrowded and the food distribution system is so poor that some children are unable to eat in the time period allotted.
- The maintenance work order system is centralized; so long delays result for getting anything fixed.
- The ratio of custodians to pupils is poor, and the sites are not clean.
- There are no full-time nurses, psychologists, or social workers at the school sites.
- The parking is inadequate.

NNW then asked the committee how a separate Southeast area school district might better address these issues. The committee cited in response:

- Local commitment means a Southeast area school district would be more responsive to the needs of the local public schools.
- Smaller size is beneficial operationally and financially. For example, some vendors do not want to deal with LAUSD.
- There would be greater resources derived from efficiencies and redistribution of resources.
- Self-determination and a local school board could set the proper course.
- An opportunity to hire more competent and enthusiastic teachers.
- A smaller district would reduce the magnitude of every issue (e.g. the need to build 1 school as opposed to 85).

Community Meetings Held November 14 and 29, 2001

NNW facilitated two community meetings in the Southeast Area to garner general input from community members in the Southeast Area. Senator Martha Escutia’s office assisted in the coordination of the meetings.

Advertising of Meetings

Flyers advertising the meeting purpose, date, time and location, along with instructions for circulation, were distributed to:

- All school sites in District J (33 sites) and I (the 3 sites within the study area), a separate packet was sent to the principal’s attention and to the attention of the parent group president
- All city clerks’ offices for all affected cities in the Southeast Area
- All mayoral offices for all affected cities in the Southeast Area

- Community groups as identified by Senator Escutia's Office
- Senator Escutia's office, Assemblyman Firebaugh's office, LAUSD, UTLA, SECEDE and Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization

Approximately 3,000 flyers were distributed in addition to an advertisement on water bills in Huntington Park and by staff working with the SECEDE committee.

The flyers were printed in both English and Spanish. Spanish translation was provided at each meeting. A copy of the flyer materials is enclosed in Appendix B-1.

Overview of the Meetings

Approximately 35 – 50 individuals attended each meeting. Despite all efforts at publicizing the meetings, the turnout was considered low. In NNW's opinion, this does not indicate a groundswell of support for dividing off the Southeast Area into a separate district. This was confirmed in the comments made by those in attendance as summarized here and tape recorded.

The first meeting on November 14, 2001 was comprised of approximately 50% from UTLA members, many teaching in the local schools. The balance of the group was comprised of parents and civic leaders.

The second meeting drew more parents, although the turnout was considered low.

Tape recordings of the meeting proceedings are on file with the CDE. The following is a sampling of input, by constituency group. Note: the quotes have been edited only for clarity and not context.

We are deeply hurt by the possible break up...we worked very hard at Nimitz School to bring (test) scores up. Resentment from teachers against the break-up has been going on since 1980. Bond issues archives will show that teachers put money into the fund for these schools themselves. --Teacher

Break-up will not build one more school or help existing conditions. -- Teacher

Elizabeth Learning Center teachers have worked hard to accomplish higher scores -- Teacher

Inequities are the issue...half the number of schools (in the Southeast) and more neglect in this district as opposed to other districts like wealthy schools of West LA. The data was grouped and (he) saw exactly the inequities. The new construction plans for District B, 4200 new high school seats as opposed to

District J with only 2500 new high school seats. Dialog after dialog and meetings with Supt. Romer and we asked; "why there is no parity?" (In the Southeast) there are 1,700 children per school as opposed to 600 to 700 per school in other districts. They have a plan as to where and how the new schools are to be built, but how do we fit into the equation? Teacher performance was never an issue." – Teacher and Civic Leader

As a parent my message to the people concerned is that the parents have fought to obtain better education. This has been going on for fifteen years. We understand that the break up is very difficult, but the story is the same. "This is the same monkey only with a different dress on." Mr. Romer and Mr. Cortinez were there when restructuring was proposed, and we fought for the higher standards for the schools in District J. There has been no action on this information from five years ago when the question was raised, when they took the tests and the results were in. If we truly unite community and teachers we should remember that if we do support UTLA we could keep those good teachers. I would like an efficient plan of action. We do not want to see another ten years of the past. I am going to invite all the parents I know to the next meeting. Take into consideration an effective plan of action, but many parents are sick and tired of the corruption that is going on. -- Parent

I agree that District J has improved and 80% of students are living in poverty levels according to the free lunch program. Gage is a high needs school receiving 1.5 million dollars from the State of California... This break up will not bring any more funding to build new schools. Bonds would be the only way to build new schools. Should and if District J break off from LASD this new school district would lose a lot of good teachers because LAUSD offers lifetime benefits after retirement. The new school district would not be able to match these benefits, because the new school district would have to build a new administrative facility, and mostly pay legal expenses associated with the break up. The other school districts would look forward to the break up since there would be a lot of credentialed teachers moving out of employment from District J and available to other Districts like I and G. District J would only be able to get teachers fresh out of college and without credentials. – UTLA Representative

A school survey indicated that 80% would leave the new (Southeast) school district. I think we should work together to solve these issues -- Teacher

I am shocked at the figures that have been presented (regarding facilities inequities) and this study should look at these figures closely and in fact if those figures are true, then determine how LAUSD could do what they have promised and how they could discriminate this way? What rationale is there for this, this is shameful. I would like to see in print the rational for the past 25 years from LAUSD on this. -- Teacher

I have had problems with my child in District J and LA responded with good response, full investigation and response to my issues. I have seen improvement. -- Parent

Most improvements came from frustration and we had to go up to Sacramento and fight for our issues to be heard. We got our support and now we have a feasibility study with findings. Should the feasibility study indicate it would be detrimental to the schools, and then no, we would not support it; however if the feasibility report indicates it could be done, and then we would support it, and if our cities could not afford this, we would have a hard time supporting this. UTLA, LAUSD, all worked on this and was supported by the parents. – Civic Leader

LAUSD has known that there are a lot of kids here for many years. -- Parent

Little or no room for students at the schools, we have a problem that the parents do not come to the meetings. As a volunteer I have heard about new schools that are going to come but nothing has happened. We hear this a lot. The problem is at the schools; the books are so old you can't read them. You can go to the schools and you see how cramped they are for yourself. -- Parent

Things have gotten better; we need a list of pros and cons to make a decision. -- Teacher

Schools have been ignored for 28 years -- Parent

Schools have been neglected for ten years, over crowding has been going on for a long time and Park Av. School has been neglected. In the last year or so there has been more attention than before. So this may be that the school district feels more pressure because of the potential break up. Certainly our schools have not been given the attention that had been promised while other schools get what they need and still we may need to make more noise to get the LAUSD's attention. – Civic Leader

How will this (breaking away) help our children? There seems that there is no commitment to improving the conditions at our schools. -- Parent

There have been a lot of issues that have not been addressed. -- Parent

I have lived here all my life, and the only improvements have occurred within the last year or so. There has been improvement but not enough. There is still major on going problems and may be the new localized school would have a better ability to handle these issues. -- Parent

We had to go to the board of education to complain to get anything done. This is what it takes? "This is not right." LAUSD has not listened to us until we

complained, and now we start getting action? This is not right. I can't have our schools breakaway. -- Parent

Would like to see the break up of the district because LAUSD is not with it. -- Parent

If the district becomes its own district, how will that solve the problems of over crowding? How will the new district be better? How will that get paid for? -- Parent